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ABSTRACT

Multicultural empathy has been recognized as an important factor in successfully treating ethnic minority clients. A study detailing the relationship between White counselor trainees' general ability to empathize and their ability to interact comfortably outside their culture of origin is described in this paper. Thirty-three counselor trainees enrolled in masters level school and agency counseling program were administered the "Empathy Test" and the "Culture Shock Inventory." Results indicate no significant association between counselor trainees' general ability to engage in cognitive empathy and their tendency toward cultural sensitivity. It appears that there is no relationship between general ability to predict general social norms that involve some understanding of the representation of cultural differences and an overall ability to comfortably function within a culturally different setting and/or with culturally different individuals. Consequently, those who know about the existence of cultural differences may or may not be comfortable or effective in cross-cultural interaction, In addition, being able to function within culturally different environments or with culturally different individuals does not automatically imply that one is able to engage in objective empathy or than one can predict the behavior of others. Implications for training and research are discussed. (MKA)

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Running head: Multicultural Counseling Training

Empathy and Cross-cultural Sensitivity

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R. STEWARD

Empathy and Cross-cultural Sensitivity

Abstract

No significant association was found between the degree to which counselor trainees' general ability to engage in cognitive empathy and a tendency toward cultural sensitivity. It would appear that there is no relationship between general ability to predict general social norms that involve some understanding of the representation of cultural differences and an overall ability to comfortably function within a culturally different setting and/or with cultural different individuals. Consequently, those who 'know' about the existence of cultural differences may or may not be comfortable or effective in cross-cultural interaction. In addition, being able to function within culturally different environments or with cultural different individuals does not automatically imply that one if able to engage in objective empathy or predict the behaviors of others in general. Implications for training and future res

Empathy and Cross-cultural Sensitivity

The construct of multicultural empathy has been recognized as an important factor contributing to success in the counseling of ethnic minority clients. However, training in multicultural empathy varies across educational settings. This is partially due to the fact that we do not know specifically what contributes most significantly to the developing of multicultural empathy. The purpose of this research is to systematically examine the relationship between components of counseling skills and cross-cultural sensitivity. Specifically, this paper will examine the relationship between white counselor-trainees' general ability to empathize and their ability to interact comfortably outside of their culture of origin.

Multicultural counseling competencies have been defined to include the following three aspects (1) understanding and awareness of the experiences and world views of various cultural groups (2) understanding the communication barriers which result from these differences in culture, and (3) acquiring a specific set of skills and abilities for working with multicultural clients (Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995).

Although these core factors of multicultural competency have been identified, a number of barriers to effective multicultural counseling continue to exist. These areas consist of language differences between counselor and client, differences in world view , and

conflicting stages of racial identity development (Scott & Borodovsky, 1990).

An important question is therefore how to train majority counselors, in light of these barriers, to effectively counsel minority clients. A key step in overcoming barriers in counseling relationships is the development of empathy (Scott & Borodovsky, 1990). Preliminary research has indicated that self-awareness is an important component in developing multicultural empathy and understanding (Sue et. al., 1982). Self-awareness can be described as the process of assessing one's values, biases, and experiences in relationship to one's cultural affiliation. As Brown states, "Values, culturally specific or otherwise, provide the lenses through which people judge their own actions as well as the actions of others" (1997). Trainees must be fully aware and understand their cultural assumptions in order develop the skills and knowledge to most adequately counsel minority clients (Sue & Sue, 1990)..

Gladstein (1997) defines two types of empathy - - affective empathy and cognitive empathy. Affective empathy consists of responding in a similar emotional tone to another person's emotional display, while cognitive empathy is defined as understanding and taking the role of another person on an intellectual basis. (Gladstein, 1997).

In working with minority clients the sole use of affective empathy creates a false feeling of understanding and communication . The counselor also

needs to understand the client's environment in an intellectual sense (cognitive empathy). This means the counselor must comprehend "how the client interacts within and to his or her environment while the counselor maintains total cultural self-other differentiation". This ensures that the counselor gains an awareness of exact cultural differences between himself/herself and the client (Scott & Borodovsky, 1990, 168).

One of the primary ways in which trainees gain cognitive empathy is through cultural role taking. The counselor must understand what the daily lives of a minority clients consist of. As Scott and Borodovsky (1990) state, the counselor is faced with (a) a client he/she must get to know, (b) another culture he/she must obtain information about, and (c) a client whose thoughts, perceptions, and experiences are related to his/her functioning in a specific culture .

Research has shown multicultural simulations to be effective in increasing the awareness of cultural differences (Russell & Berger, 1993). In one simulation, viewers were not previously informed of the cultural norms of those involved in the simulation. During the simulation viewers saw women sitting at the feet of men with their heads bowed. Furthermore, the men sat in chairs while the women removed their shoes. In a subsequent discussion participants were asked to describe what they had seen. Most found this extremely difficult to do without allowing their own cultural interpretation to bias their answers. Interestingly, the viewers

automatically perceived the skit in terms of what the participants behaviors would mean in the dominant white culture. Viewers were quit shocked to learn that they had witnessed a ceremony from a matriarchal culture, not a patriarchal culture.

Participants completed the discussion with an heightened awareness of understanding diversity. The counseling professionals described the need to learn as much as possible about a client's personal culture before diagnosis. "Group members were sensitized to different realities, forcing critical evaluations of the true meaning of what was observed. Group members learned that initially people interpret what is seen through personal and cultural world views" (Russell & Berger, 1993).

Research with triad models has received positive feedback from trainees and clients. The studies matched a counselor trainee with a culturally similar three person triad, in the roles of client, anti-counselor (makes explicit negative messages, and a pro-counselor (makes explicit positive messages). Feedback from the pro-counselor was rated as helpful in increasing the trainee's specific knowledge about the client's problem, while the anti-counselor's opposing views served to decrease the trainee's racism and cultural bias (Sue, 1980). Other research indicates that those involved in Triad Training were rated high on expertness, attractiveness, trustworthiness, accurate understanding, and unconditional positive regard (Hernandez & Kerr, 1985).

There is currently a vast amount of literature on the various training perspectives concerning multicultural counseling. However, the majority of research is from the perspective of trainees and supervision. Further research on clients' perceptions of empathy and cross-cultural sensitivity is needed to accurately assess training methods.

The primary objective of this study is to empirically examine the association between counselor trainees' general ability to engage in cognitive empathy and the engagement of behaviors and thinking that would facilitate comfortable interaction in a culturally different setting and with culturally different individuals. Given the prior literature and research, there are currently two different points of view regarding this relationship. One perspective is that trainees who are able to engage in objective empathy in general will not necessarily be able to comfortably engage others who are culturally different. This view supports the notion that multicultural counseling training is an additive and necessary experience to basic counseling competency. However, another perspective is the trainees who are able to engage in objective empathy is general should also be able to comfortably engage others who are culturally different. This view supports the notion that traditional training practices are adequate and sufficient. The intent of this study is to empirically examine the relationship between these two very important variables in training counselors.

Methods

Participants

Thirty-three counselor-trainees enrolled in a masters level School and Agency Counseling program located in a large, Midwestern, predominantly White state university. Though two foreign students and two American-born racial/ethnic minority trainees were included in the initial sample, research packets of these trainees were excluded due to under-representation. Consequently, the thirty-three participants were all Anglo Americans.

Measures

The Empathy Test (TET; Kerr & Speroff, 1951). The TET was designed to assess individuals' ability to engage in empathic thinking. Empathic thinking is defined in this case as the ability to understand and anticipate the reactions of others. The measure requests examinees to rank order values that are those of others: society in general and older persons. Higher scores are indicative of greater ability to predict another's perspective. Test-retest reliability coefficients range from .67 (108 college men) to 1.81 (60 Eastern college students). A split-half reliability coefficient of .89 on 124 male skilled workers.

Clinical fellows within the American Psychological Association were found to have a mean score of 87.7, and reliability coefficients range from .67 to .81. TET scores have been found to be significantly and positively related to: interpersonal desirability of college men;

the ability to be an effective supervisor; the participation in leadership roles in university student organizations; the ability to feel what others feel; and the ability to be an effective salesperson.

Culture Shock Inventory (CSI; Reddin & Rowell, 1975). The CSI was designed to acquaint those who expect work outside their own culture with some of the factors that may cause them to be less efficient. Culture Shock is a psychological disorientation caused by misunderstanding or not understanding cues form another culture. It arises from lack of knowledge, limited prior experience and personal rigidity.

The inventory consists entirely of statements among which the respondent chooses to agree to disagree. The eighty questions are equally divided between the eight scales: lack of western ethnocentrism (the degree to which the Western value system is seen as possibly inappropriate for all), experience (the degree of direct experience with people from others cultural through working, traveling and conversing, and also leaned skills such as reading and speaking foreign languages), cognitive flex (the degree of openness to new ideas and beliefs and the degree to which these are accepted by the individuals), behavioral flex (the degree to which ones own behavior is open to change), cultural knowledge-general (the degree of awareness and understanding of various beliefs and institutions in other cultures); cultural knowledge-specific (the degree of awareness and understanding of various beliefs and

patterns of behavior in specific other cultures), cultural behavior-general (the degree of awareness and understanding of patterns of behavior observed in others); and interpersonal sensitivity (the degree of awareness and understanding of verbal and nonverbal human behavior).

Higher scores indicate a greater degree of cultural sensitivity. Raw scores on each of the subscales can be translated into five categories: very low, low, average, high, and very high. These steps are called adjusted scores of descriptive terms. Within one sample of masters level counselors (Steward, 1993), 'high' scores were found on cultural behavior-general and cultural knowledge- general; 'low' scores on cognitive flex, culture, knowledge-specific. Other subscales were found in the 'average' range: ethnocentrism, cross-cultural experience; interpersonal sensitivity, and behavioral flex.

Scale inter-correlations among items ranged from .01 to .41; 21 of 28 were found to be below .25. Scales are thus reasonably independent and may be considered separately. On two month test-retest, scale reliability has been found to range from .57 to .86. The primary sources of validity information are the Behavioral Inventory Batter.

Data Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed in order to examine the association between CSI and TET scores. Descriptive data will also presented.

Results

Table 1 presents all descriptive results of the variables examined. Participants' mean scores were found to indicate: 'high' scores on Cultural knowledge-general, cultural behavior-general, and interpersonal sensitivity; 'average' scores on lack of western ethnocentrism and behavioral flex; and, low scores on experience, cultural knowledge-specific, and cognitive flexibility. The mean TET score, 138.29, was found to be significantly higher than that of APA Clinical Fellows in earlier research, 87.7.

Table 2 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis. None of the CSI subscales were found to be significantly associated with TET scores, In addition, no significant Pearson product correlations were found between either pairs of all variables examined.

Discussion

No significant association was found between the degree to which counselor trainees' general ability to engage in cognitive empathy and a tendency toward cultural sensitivity. It would appear that there is no relationship between general ability to predict general social norms that involve some understanding of the representation of cultural differences and an overall ability to comfortably function within a culturally different setting and/or with cultural different individuals. Consequently, those who 'know' about the

existence of cultural differences may or may not be comfortable or effective in cross-cultural interaction. In addition, being able to function within culturally different environments or with cultural different individuals does not automatically imply that one if able to engage in objective empathy or predict the behaviors of others in general.

This appears to be a case wherein the lack of significant results in an empirical study suggests very significant implications. Findings from this study appear to indicate the distinctiveness of each of these variables and the additive nature of multicultural counseling training. Training that involves the development in competence in objectivity and comfort in culturally different working relationships would seemingly both be required for ensuring counseling competence among all trainees.

Findings also suggest what experiences might be highlighted in training. Given that low scores were found in Experience, Cognitive flexibility, and cultural knowledge specific, it would seem that counselor-trainees would be more advanced in their skill and awareness than these results indicated given the nature of the profession. This is also true for those areas in which the trainees were found to be average: interpersonal sensitivity, behavioral flexibility, and lack of Western ethnocentrism. Training that emphasizes the enhancement of such competencies and knowledge for similar samples of counselor trainees. It might be imperative that we

understand that counselors must be more aware and knowledgeable in areas of cultural knowledge, lack of ethnocentrism, and interpersonal sensitivity than the average individual within general society. We must be better due to the nature of what we do.

The authors believe that the most positive finding was the overall mean TET scores. It appeared that these counselor trainees' ability to 'think empathically' as defined by this measure far exceeded that of even APA Clinical Psychology Fellows and all other populations on which this measure had been normed. However, even with this result, readers must note that there was a wide range of competency indicated within this sample, in spite of the shared training experiences. These findings suggest that the outcomes of training is not the same for all. Other factors not examined in this study that contribute to these differences in outcomes might be examined in future research.

Readers must note that the small sample size and the fact that participants were located in only one training may significantly influence the generalizability of the findings. Future research that specifically examines the degree to which multicultural counseling training does influence the ability to empathize within counseling relationships with culturally different clients is strongly recommended. It is also suggested that interested readers begin to address the influence of multicultural counseling training on counseling effectiveness of racial/ethnic minority counselor

trainees with both majority and minority clientele.

Table 1.

Means, standard deviations, and ranges of each of the variables examined.

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	Category
Empathy	138.3	25.2	95-191	NA
Lack of Western Ethnocentrism	6.4	1.9	2-9	Average
Experience	3.9	2.4	0-9	Low
Cognitive Flex	5.4	2.0	1-10	Low
Behavioral Flex	6.5	2.1	2-10	Average
Cultural Knowledge-Specific	5.2	1.7	1-8	Low
Cultural Knowledge-General	7.8	1.2	5-10	High
Cultural Behavior-General	7.2	1.9	3-10	High
Interpersonal Sensitivity	7.6	1.5	4-10	Average

Table 2.

Multiple Regression Analysis with TET scores as the dependent variables.

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
Lack of Western Ethnocentrism	.27	1.51	.04	.18	.85
Experience	1.45	1.49	.27	.97	.33
Cognitive Flex	.49	1.89	.07	.26	.79
Behavioral Flex	-.41	1.67	-.06	-.24	.81
Cultural Knowledge-Specific	-2.13	1.45	-.29	-1.47	.15
Cultural Knowledge-General	-1.61	2.24	.14	.72	.48
Cultural Behavior-General	-.12	1.74	-.02	-.07	.94
Interpersonal Sensitivity	1.60	1.86	.18	.85	.40

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